Reparations for slavery

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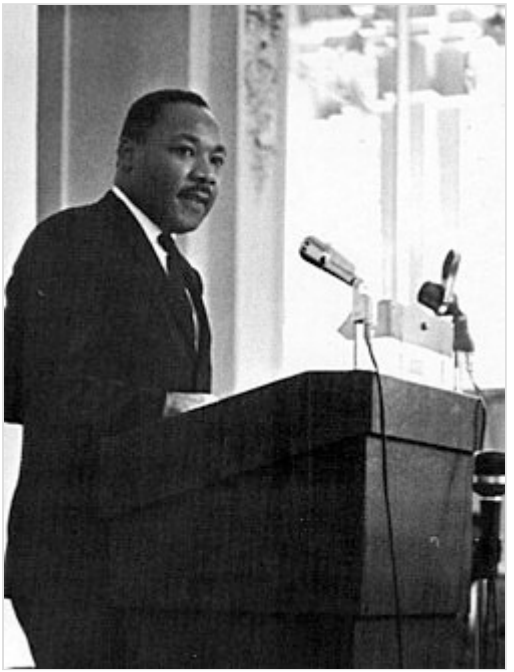
Reparations for slavery is the idea that some form of compensatory payment needs to be made to the descendants of Africans who had been enslaved as part of the Atlantic Slave Trade. The most notable demands for reparations have been made in the United Kingdom and in the United States. Caribbean and African states from which slaves were taken have also made reparation demands.



It's a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself by his own bootstraps. ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

Quotes

1935

- President Johnson, forgetting his own pre-war declaration that the "great plantations must be seized, and divided into small farms," declared that this land must be restored to its original owners and this would be done if owners received a presidential pardon. The pardoning power was pushed and the land all over the South rapidly restored. Negroes were dispossessed.
  - W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1935), p. 603
- The first attempt of a democracy which includes the previously disfranchised poor is to redistribute wealth and income, and this is exactly what the black South attempted. The theory is that the wealth and the current income of the wealthy ruling class does not belong to them entirely, but is the product of the work and striving of the great millions; and that, therefore, these millions ought to have a voice in its more equitable distribution; and if this is true in modern countries, like France and England and Germany, how much more true was it in the South after the war where the poorest class represented the most extreme case of theft of labor that the world can conceive; namely, chattel slavery?
  - W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1935), p. 604
- The German and English and French serf, the Italian and Russian serf, were, on emancipation, given definite rights in the land. Only the American Negro slave was emancipated without such rights and in the end this spelled for him the continuation of slavery.

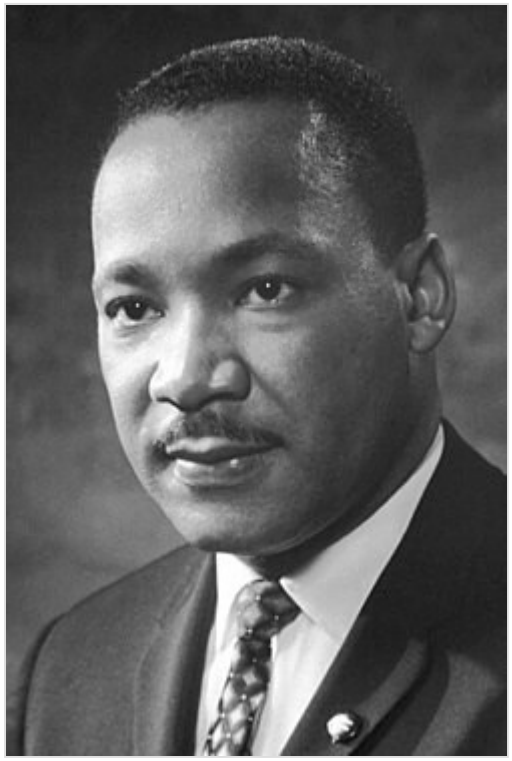
- W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1935), p. 611

1965

- If I take the wages of everyone here, individually it means nothing, but collectively all of the earning power or wages that you earned in one week would make me wealthy. And if I could collect it for a year, I'd be rich beyond dreams. Now, when you see this, and then you stop and consider the wages that were kept back from millions of Black people, not for one year but for 310 years, you'll see how this country got so rich so fast. And what made the economy as strong as it is today. And all that slave labor that was amassed in unpaid wages, is due someone today. And you're not giving us anything when we say that it's time to collect.
  - Malcolm X, "Twenty million black people in prison," in *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches*, p. 51

1968

- America freed the slaves in 1863 through the Emancipation Proclamation of Abraham Lincoln, but gave the slaves no land, nothing in reality to get started on. At the same time, America was giving away millions of acres of land in the west and the Midwest, which meant that there was a willingness to give the white peasants from Europe an economic base and yet it refused to give its black peasants from Africa who came here involuntarily, in chains, and had worked for free for 244 years, any kind of economic base. So Emancipation for the Negro was really freedom to hunger. It was freedom to the winds and rains of heaven. It was freedom without food to eat or land to cultivate and therefore it was freedom and famine at the same time. And when white Americans tell the negro to lift himself by his own bootstraps they don't look over the legacy of slavery and segregation. I believe we ought to do all we can and seek to lift ourselves by our own bootstraps but it's a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself by his own bootstraps. And many negroes by the thousands and millions have been left bootless as a result of all of these years of oppression and as a result of a society that has deliberately made his color a stigma and something worthless and degrading.
  - Martin Luther King, Jr., Remarks Delivered at the National Cathedral (https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/publications/knock-midnight-inspiration-great-sermons-reverend-martin-luther-king-jr-10), Washington, D.C., (March 31, 1968)

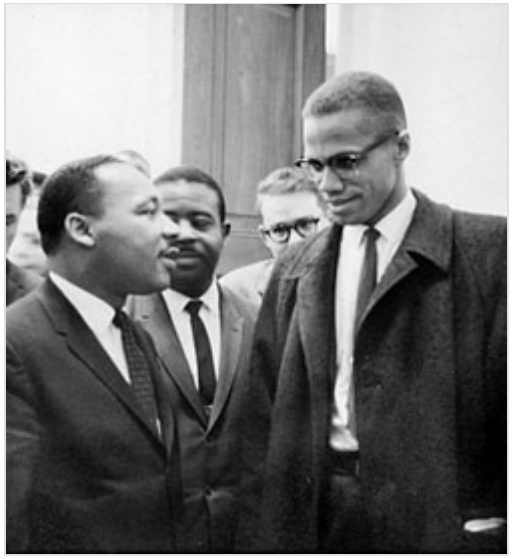


In the final analysis, the rich must not ignore the poor because both rich and poor are tied in a single garment of destiny. All life is interrelated, and all men are interdependent. The agony of the poor diminishes the rich, and the salvation of the poor enlarges the rich. We are inevitably our brothers' keeper because of the interrelated structure of reality. ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

1974

- Lacking much historical information and assuming (1) that victims of injustice generally do worse than they otherwise would and (2) that those from the least well-off group in the society have the highest probabilities of being the (descendants of) victims of the most serious injustice who are owed compensation by those who benefited from the injustices, ... then a rough rule of thumb for rectifying injustices might seem to be the following: organize society so as to maximize the position of whatever group ends up least well-off in the society.
  - Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974), pp. 231-232

2014



What made the economy as strong as it is today... all that slave labor that was amassed in unpaid wages.... We say that it's time to collect. ~Malcolm X

- Having been enslaved for 250 years, black people were not left to their own devices. They were terrorized. In the Deep South, a second slavery ruled. In the North, legislatures, mayors, civic associations, banks, and citizens all colluded to pin black people into ghettos, where they were overcrowded, overcharged, and undereducated. Businesses discriminated against them, awarding them the worst jobs and the worst wages. Police brutalized them in the streets. And the notion that black lives, black bodies, and black wealth were rightful targets remained deeply rooted in the broader society. Now we have half-stepped away from our long centuries of despoilment, promising, “Never again.” But still we are haunted. It is as though we have run up a credit-card bill and, having pledged to charge no more, remain befuddled that the balance does not disappear. The effects of that balance, interest accruing daily, are all around us.
  - Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations" (https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/), *The Atlantic*, (June 2014)

2015

- To us, therefore, you are more than a prime minister. You are a grandson of the Jamaican soil who has been privileged and enriched by your forebears' sins of the enslavement of our ancestors. As we prepare for you a red carpet befitting your formal status we invite you to cast your eyes upon the colours of our national flag that symbolise the history we share. You are, Sir, a prized product of this land and the bonanza benefits reaped by your family and inherited by you continue to bind us together like birds of a feather. Be assured, Prime Minister, that you will find no more generous people on our planet Earth than those who will greet you with golden hearts and civilised consciousness. I urge that you embrace the sincerity of our salutations. It is born and bred in the cauldron of our enslavement by your family and society. Consider it a golden gift of friendship and not simply the empty expression of protocols relevant to the events you will attend. It is furthermore, an overture to an expectation of a dialogue of reparatory justice that can redefine for us a new intimacy for this long 21st century on which we are embarked.
  - Sir Hilary Beckles, Open Letter to the Prime Minister, "Britain has duty to clean up monumental mess of Empire, Sir Hilary tells Cameron" (http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Britain-has-duty-to-clean-up-monumental-mess-of-Empire--Sir-Hilary-tells-Cameron_19230957), Jamaica Observer, (September 2015)

2017

- Last month’s torch-lit white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, a response to the planned removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee from a public park, kickstarted a national dialogue about how communities should address this nation’s centuries-long history of violence and discrimination against African Americans... Among those calling for the removal of what President Donald Trump called “beautiful statues and monuments” was 88-year-old John Conyers of Michigan, the nation’s longest serving congressman. For nearly three decades, in fact, Conyers has been arguing that there is much more the government can and should be doing to atone... Every year since 1989, Conyers has introduced House Resolution 40—a reference to the famous order by Union Army Gen. William Sherman that 40 acres of land, largely confiscated from former Confederate slaveholders, should be set aside for the families of former slaves. The bill would create a congressional commission to study the modern legacy of slavery and Jim Crow and propose recommendations—possibly including reparations for black Americans. In all that time, HR 40 has never made it out of committee, but Conyers intends to keep trying.

- ***America Has Never Truly Atoned For Slavery. John Conyers Has Pressed the Issue for Nearly 30 Years**, Mother Jones,* Brandon E. Patterson (https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2017/09/in-some-parallel-universe-congress-is-debating-how-america-could-atone-for-slavery-1/) (22 September 2017)

- "Slavery is a drawback that people don't want to have to remember," he told me. But "the labor and the work product of those that were enslaved goes into the trillions of dollars... Restoring justice requires that we address this thing."...The 13-member commission Conyers' bill calls for would spend a year reviewing the existing research on the scope and lasting impact of African American enslavement and Jim Crow-era discrimination, and ponder what the government might do to help remedy the problem...the commission, would have authority to compel federal agencies to hand over relevant records and documents. The panel also would look at federal policies that harm African Americans and suggest changes—as well as advise Congress on how to educate the public about the findings...
    - *America Has Never Truly Atoned For Slavery. John Conyers Has Pressed the Issue for Nearly 30 Years, Mother Jones,* Brandon E. Patterson (https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2017/09/in-some-parallel-universe-congress-is-debating-how-america-could-atone-for-slavery-1/) (22 September 2017)

In January of 1989, I first introduced the bill H.R. 40, Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act... The approach that I have advocated for over a decade has been for the federal government to undertake an official study of the impact of slavery on the social, political and economic life of our nation. ~United States Representative John Conyers

H.R. 40 A Bill To address the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery in the United States...

- A Bill To address the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery in the United States and the 13 American colonies between 1619 and 1865 and to establish a commission to study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery, its subsequent de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African-Americans, and the impact of these forces on living African-Americans, to make recommendations to the Congress on appropriate remedies, and for other purposes.... enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled... This Act may be cited as the ''Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act''.
    - H.R. 40 https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr40/BILLS-115hr40ih.pdf, (3 January 2017)

- SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE. 8 (a) FINDINGS.—The Congress finds that...(1) approximately 4,000,000 Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the United States and colonies that became the United States from 1619 to 1865; (2) the institution of slavery was constitutionally and statutorily sanctioned by the Government of the United States from 1789 through 1865; (3) the slavery that flourished in the United States constituted an immoral and inhumane deprivation of Africans' life, liberty, African citizenship rights, and cultural heritage, and denied them the fruits of their own labor; (4) a preponderance of scholarly, legal, community evidentiary documentation and popular culture markers constitute the basis for inquiry into the ongoing effects of the institution of slavery and its legacy of persistent systemic structures of discrimination on living African-Americans and society in the United States; and (5) following the abolition of slavery the United States Government, at the Federal, State, and local level, continued to perpetuate, condone and often profit from practices that continued to brutalize and disadvantage African-Americans, including share cropping, convict leasing, Jim Crow, redlining, unequal education, and disproportionate treatment at the hands of the criminal justice system; and (6) as a result of the historic and continued discrimination, African-Americans continue to suffer debilitating economic, educational, and health hardships including but not limited to; having nearly 1,000,000 Black people

incarcerated; an unemployment rate more than twice the current White unemployment rate; and an average of less than 1/16 of the wealth of White families, a disparity which has worsened, not improved over time....

  - H.R. 40 https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr40/BILLS-115hr40ih.pdf, (3 January 2017)

- H.R. 40 - Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act is a United States House of Representatives bill, first proposed by Rep. Conyers, John, Jr. (U.S. Representative for Michigan, now retired) calling for the creation of Commission to study and submit a formal report to Congress and the American people with it's findings and recommendations on remedies and reparation proposals for African-Americans, as a result of "(1) the institution of slavery...which included the Federal and State governments which...supported the institution of slavery; (2) the de jure and de facto discrimination against freed slaves and their descendants from the end of the Civil War to the present...; (3) the lingering negative effects of the institution of slavery...; (4) the manner in which textual and digital instructional resources and technologies are being used to deny the inhumanity of slavery and the crime against humanity of people of African descent...; (5) the role of Northern complicity in the Southern based institution of slavery; (6) the direct benefits to societal institutions, public and private, including higher education, corporations, religious and associational; (7) and thus, recommend appropriate ways to educate the American public of the Commission's findings; (8) and thus, recommend appropriate remedies in consideration of the Commission's findings..."

  - H.R. 40 https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr40/BILLS-115hr40ih.pdf, (3 January 2017)

H.R. 40... tries to... get that math figured out, and figure out the best way to do it. But if we don't actually have a study, we can't actually answer those questions. You can't ask a doctor to make a diagnosis before there's an actual examination. ~Ta-Nehisi Coates

2019

- The underlying cause has to do with deep, deep, deep realms of racial injustice, both in our criminal justice system and in our economic system... The Democratic Party should be on the side of reparations for slavery for this very reason... I do not believe that the average American is a racist, but the average American is woefully undereducated about the history of race in the United States.
- What reparations carry that race-based policies do not, is that reparations carry spiritual force there is an inherent mea culpa it is more than just economic restitution, its more than just economic restitution... It is a moral and an emotional and a psychological effect of reparations because it is an inherent acknowledgment of a wrong that has been done and a willingness to right it.
- You simply cannot have the future you want if you are not willing to clean up your past... And its time for us to put some things to bed on that issue. Its time. The civil war was over in 1865.

  - Marianne Williamson quoted in *Long-shot 2020 Dem Marianne Williamson calls for reparations, after debate skirmish over South Bend shooting* (https://www.foxnews.com/politics/long-shot-2020-dem-marianne-williamson-calls-for-reparations-after-debate-skirmish-over-south-bend-shooting) (28 June 2019)

- I don't think reparations for something that happened 150 years ago, for whom none of us currently living are responsible, is a good idea. We've, you know, tried to deal with our original sin of slavery by fighting a civil war, by passing landmark civil rights legislation. We've elected an African-American president. I think we're always a work in progress in this country, but no one currently alive was responsible for that. And I don't think we should be trying to figure out how to compensate for it. First of all, it would be pretty hard to figure out who to compensate. We've had waves of immigrants, as well, who have come to the country and experienced dramatic discrimination of one kind or another. So, no, I don't think reparations are a good idea.

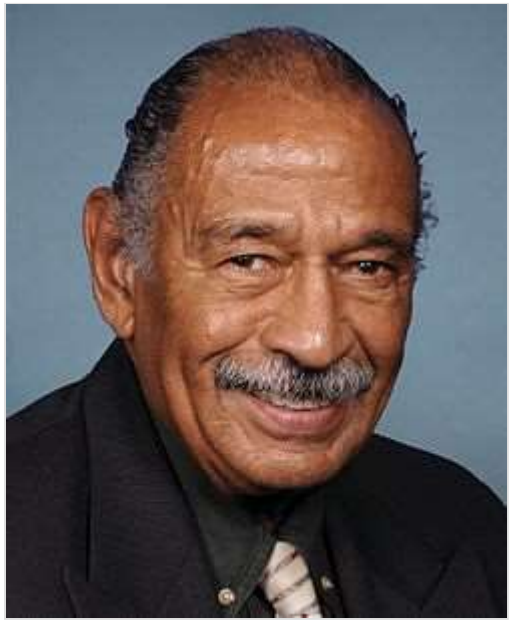
- U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell quoted in *Writer Ta-Nehisi Coates Makes the Case for Reparations at Historic Congressional Hearing, Democracy Now* (https://www.democracynow.org/2019/6/20/ta_nehisi_coates_testimony_congress_reparations#transcript) (20 June 2019)

- The cumulative damages inflicted on black Americans who were enslaved and their descendants of course include slavery, but they also encompass almost 100 years of Jim Crow legal segregation and persistent racism in the post-Civil Rights era continuing to the present. The latter is manifest in mass incarceration, police executions of unarmed blacks (de facto lynchings), discrimination in employment, and, significantly, the enormous racial wealth divide between black and white Americans.
  Monetary restitution has been a centerpiece of virtually all other cases of reparations, both at home and abroad. While some commentators are concerned that money is "not enough," money is precisely what is required to eliminate the most glaring indicator of racial injustice, the racial wealth divide. Respect for black American citizenship will be signaled by monetary compensation. Payment of the debt is, as Charles Henry puts it, "long overdue." H.R. 40 provides an opportunity to begin the process of fulfilling the long-standing national obligation.

  - *How reparations for American descendants of slavery could narrow the racial wealth divide, NBC News* William Darity Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen, (https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/how-reparations-american-descendants-slavery-could-narrow-racial-wealth-divide-ncna1019691) (20 June 2019)

- Members of the Project 21 black leadership network said that the legislative proposal to study giving reparations to descendants of slaves is a "sham," calling the idea both unnecessary and divisive. The proposal in question is Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee's (D-TX) bill HR 40, which would set up a commission to study reparations strategies. The House Judiciary Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties held a hearing on the bill on Wednesday... But Project 21 members said in a statement the black Americans have the same opportunities to live the American Dream as all Americans and that the proposal is a "crass political move to drum up black support and will only hurt race relations... Reparations is a sham"
  Congress should be reminding blacks that opportunities do exist for them and have existed for generations," Project 21 member Emery McClendon said. "It's up to individuals to discover these opportunities to succeed. Let's flip the script from reparations to personal responsibility."

  - *Conservative Black Activists Call Reparations Proposal Unnecessary Divisive 'Sham', Breitbart,* Penny Starr (https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2019/06/20/conservative-black-activists-call-reparations-proposal-unnecessary-divisive-sham/) (20 June 2019)



My bill (HR 40) does four things: 1) It acknowledges the fundamental injustice and inhumanity of slavery 2) It establishes a commission to study slavery, its subsequent racial and economic discrimination against freed slaves; 3) It studies the impact of those forces on today's living African Americans; and 4) The commission would then make recommendations to Congress on appropriate remedies to redress the harm inflicted on living African Americans. ---*Reparations, Conyers.house.gov.* (https://web.archive.org/web/20150829135025/http://conyers.house.gov/index.cfm/reparations) ~United States Representative John Conyers

- Those who can't see the importance of Wednesday's congressional hearing and the H.R. 40 bill, usually argue that slavery was "so long ago." Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell thinks reparations are not a good idea, claiming "it would be pretty hard to figure out who to compensate," and claims "none of us currently living are responsible" for what happened 150 years ago. McConnell believes America made up for slavery by electing Barack Obama, and passing civil rights legislation -- though he sees no need to restore the Voting Rights Act, and calls efforts to expand voting rights a "half-baked, socialist proposal."
  Such arguments only belittle the issue, ignore history and the present, and are designed to obfuscate and change the subject. America always was -- and continues to be -- a divisive place, built on the enslavement of Africans and the genocide of native people.

- *Mitch McConnell's reparations comments belittle the issue, CNN,* David A. Love (https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/19/opinions/slavery-reparations-hr40-mitch-mcconnell-love/index.html) (19 June 2019)

- For the first time, most major Democratic presidential contenders are talking about whether the U.S. government should consider paying reparations to the descendants of African Americans who were enslaved and suffered from large-scale racial discrimination. At least three of these candidates... support the creation of a commission that would study the impact of slavery and the Jim Crow discrimination against black Americans that continued after emancipation. The commission would make recommendations about how to compensate black Americans for those injustices...
  A major justification for the government paying reparations directly to individuals or establishing other forms of compensation, such as investment in majority-black communities, lies in the harsh reality of the labor stolen from millions of enslaved people from 1619 to 1865. That justification extends to many more millions severely oppressed for the next century and a half – whether through racist segregation laws or informal discrimination authorities did nothing to stop...
  Since 1619, when the first enslaved Africans were taken to Jamestown, Virginia, the oppression of black people by whites has been embedded in America's economic, political, educational and other institutions...
  Trillions... in wealth was effectively stolen from black Americans not just because of enslavement prior to 1776 but during the Jim Crow era through employment discrimination and decades of bureaucratic finagling that caused them to lose farmland... the total cost to black Americans over four centuries of slavery, Jim Crow laws and more contemporary discrimination...in the $10-$20 trillion range.

  - *The case for African American reparations — explained, Alternet*, Joe R. Feagin (https://www.alternet.org/2019/04/the-case-for-african-american-reparations-explained/), (24 April 2019)

Reparations are ultimately about respect and reconciliation — and the hope that one day, all Americans can walk together toward a more just future. We owe it to those who were ripped from their homes those many years ago an ocean away; we owe it to the millions of Americans-yes they were Americans – who were born into bondage, knew a life of servitude, and died anonymous deaths, as prisoners of this system. We owe it to the millions of descendants of these slaves... ~Sheila Jackson Lee (U.S. Representative for Texas's 18th congressional district)

- Opponents of this reparations effort, which would require support from the university's board to take effect, voiced two common arguments against it: Slavery happened too long ago and not all white Americans have slave-owning ancestors. Similar arguments are now commonplace. The assumption that those debts are owed by and to people now deceased ignores all the money, property and other wealth white Americans alive today inherited from their forebears, including slave owners and many others responsible for depriving blacks of economic and educational opportunities through discrimination. The latter included white overseers, sheriffs and merchants...
  Most whites can trace their roots back at least three generations, with many going back between four and 20 generations... White-implemented government home-ownership programs after World War II, including mortgage programs for veterans, discriminated on a large scale against blacks. These government programs enabled many millions of white families to move into the middle class. The children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of these whites have since inherited wealth due to the ensuing growth in the value of that housing...
  In contrast, black families usually endured housing discrimination after World War II. They were unable to obtain mortgages and were barred by restrictive covenants from buying homes in white areas where housing values rose....Today's wealth gap between white and black Americans is substantially the result of government-supported housing and employment discrimination. The median net worth of black families is less than 15% of that of white families, according to the Federal Reserve.

  - *The case for African American reparations — explained, Alternet*, Joe R. Feagin (https://www.alternet.org/2019/04/the-case-for-african-american-reparations-explained/), (24 April 2019)

Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee: Statement on the Historic Hearing on H.R. 40 - a Bill to Establish a Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans (19 June 2019)

Press Statement, (19 June 2019) Full text online (https://jacksonlee.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/congresswoman-sheila-jackson-lee-statement-on-the-historic-hearing-on-hr)

If I injure you, the injury persists even after I actually commit the act. If I stab you, you may suffer complications long after that initial actual stabbing. If I shoot you, you may suffer complications long after that initial shooting. That's the case with African Americans. There are people well within the living memory of this country that are still suffering from the after-effects of that. ~Ta-Nehisi Coates

- Four hundred years ago, ships set sail from the west coast of Africa and in the process, began one of mankind's most inhumane practices: human bondage and slavery. For two centuries, human beings – full of hopes and fears, dreams and concerns, ambition and anguish – were transported onto ships like chattel, and the lives of many forever changed. The reverberations from this horrific series of acts – a transatlantic slave trade that touched the shores of a colony that came to be known as America, and later a democratic republic known as the United States of America – are unknown and worthy of exploration. Approximately 4,000,000 Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the United States and colonies that became the United States from 1619 to 1865.

- The institution of slavery was constitutionally and statutorily sanctioned by the Government of the United States from 1789 through 1865. American Slavery is our country's original sin and its existence at the birth of our nation is a permanent scar on our country's founding documents, and on the venerated authors of those documents, and it is a legacy that continued well into the last century. The framework for our country and the document to which we all take an oath describes African Americans as three-fifths a person. The infamous Dred Scott decision of the United States Supreme Court, issued just a few decades later, described slaves as private property, unworthy of citizenship. And, a civil war that produced the largest death toll of American fighters in any conflict in our history could not prevent the indignities of Jim Crow, the fire hose at lunch counters and the systemic and institutional discrimination that would follow for a century after the end of the Civil War.

- The mythology built around the Civil War—that victory by the North eradicated slavery and all of its vestiges throughout our nation—has obscured our discussions of the impact of chattel slavery and made it difficult to have a national dialogue on how to fully account for its place in American history and public policy. While it is nearly impossible to determine how the lives touched by slavery could have flourished in the absence of bondage, we have certain datum that permits us to examine how a subset of Americans – African Americans – have been affected by the callousness of involuntary servitude. We know that in almost every segment of society – education, healthcare, jobs and wealth – the inequities that persist in America are more acutely and disproportionately felt in Black America.

- Reparations are ultimately about respect and reconciliation — and the hope that one day, all Americans can walk together toward a more just future. We owe it to those who were ripped from their homes those many years ago an ocean away; we owe it to the millions of Americans-yes they were Americans – who were born into bondage, knew a life of servitude, and died anonymous deaths, as prisoners of this system. We owe it to the millions of descendants of these slaves, for they are the heirs to a society of inequities and indignities that naturally filled the vacuum after slavery was formally abolished 154 years ago. Today represents the first time in history that the House of Representatives will host a hearing on H.R. 40.

- It is perhaps fitting that the hearing occurs on the 19th of June, also known to many in this room, as Juneteenth – the day that, 154 years ago, General Gordon Granger rode into Galveston, Texas and announced the freedom of the last American slaves; belatedly freeing 250,000 slaves in Texas nearly two and a half years after Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth was first celebrated in the Texas state capital in 1867 under the direction of the Freedmen's Bureau. Juneteenth was and is a living symbol of freedom for people who did

not have it. Today, Juneteenth remains the oldest known celebration of slavery's demise. It commemorates freedom while acknowledging the sacrifices and contributions made by courageous African Americans towards making our great nation the more conscious and accepting country that it has become.

- And let me end as I began, noting that this year is the 400th commemoration of the 1619 arrival of the first captive Africans in English North America, at Point Comfort, Virginia. With those dates as bookends to today's hearing, let us proceed with the cause of this morning with a full heart, with the knowledge that this work will take time and trust. Let us also do so with the spirit of reconciliation and understanding that this bill represents."

What reparations carry that race-based policies do not, is that reparations carry spiritual force there is an inherent mea culpa it is more than just economic restitution, its more than just economic restitution... It is a moral and an emotional and a psychological effect of reparations because it is an inherent acknowledgment of a wrong that has been done and a willingness to right it. … You simply cannot have the future you want if you are not willing to clean up your past... ~Marianne Williamson

***Ta-Nehisi Coates Makes the Case for Reparations at Historic Congressional Hearing, Democracy Now'* (20 June 2019)**

(full program & transcript online) (https://www.democracynow.org/2019/6/20/ta_nehisi_coates_testimony_congress_reparations#transcript)

- Yesterday, when asked about reparations, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell offered a familiar reply: America should not be held liable for something that happened 150 years ago, since none of us currently alive are responsible... This rebuttal proffers a strange theory of governance, that American accounts are somehow bound by the lifetime of its generations. But well into this century, the United States was still paying out pensions to the heirs of Civil War soldiers. We honor treaties that date back some 200 years, despite no one being alive who signed those treaties... But we are American citizens, and thus bound to a collective enterprise that extends beyond our individual and personal reach.

- As historian Ed Baptist has written, enslavement, quote, "shaped every crucial aspect of the economy and politics" of America, so that by 1836 more than $600 million, or almost half of the economic activity in the United States, derived directly or indirectly from the cotton produced by the million-odd slaves. By the time the enslaved were emancipated, they comprised the largest single asset in America—$3 billion in 1860 dollars, more than all the other assets in the country combined.
  The method of cultivating this asset was neither gentle cajoling nor persuasion, but torture, rape and child trafficking. Enslavement reigned for 250 years on these shores. When it ended, this country could have extended its hallowed principles—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—to all, regardless of color. But America had other principles in mind. And so, for a century after the Civil War, black people were subjected to a relentless campaign of terror, a campaign that extended well into the lifetime of Majority Leader McConnell.
  It is tempting to divorce this modern campaign of terror, of plunder, from enslavement. But the logic of enslavement, of white supremacy, respects no such borders, and the god of bondage was lustful and begat many heirs—coup d'états and convict leasing. vagrancy laws and debt peonage, redlining and racist GI bills, poll taxes and state-sponsored terrorism.

- We grant that Mr. McConnell was not alive for Appomattox. But he was alive for the electrocution of George Stinney. He was alive for the blinding of Isaac Woodard. He was alive to witness kleptocracy in his native Alabama and a regime premised on electoral theft. Majority Leader McConnell cited civil rights legislation yesterday, as well he should, because he was alive to witness the harassment, jailing and betrayal of those responsible for that legislation by a government sworn to protect them. He was alive for the redlining of Chicago and the looting of black homeowners of some $4 billion. Victims of that plunder are very much alive today. I am sure they'd love a word with the majority leader.
  What they know, what this committee must know, is that while emancipation dead-bolted the door against the bandits of America, Jim Crow wedged the windows wide open. And that is the thing about Senator McConnell's "something." It was 150 years ago. And it was right now.

The typical black family in this country has one-tenth the wealth of the typical white family. Black women die in childbirth at four times the rate of white women. And there is, of course, the shame of this land of the free boasting the largest prison population on the planet, of which the descendants of the enslaved make up the largest share.

***Ta-Nehisi Coates: Reparations Are Not Just About Slavery But Also Centuries of Theft & Racial Terror, Democracy Now* (20 June 2019)**

(full program & transcript online) (https://www.democracynow.org/2019/6/20/ta_nehisi_coates_reparations_america_slavery)

Now we have half-stepped away from our long centuries of despoilment, promising, "Never again." But still we are haunted. It is as though we have run up a credit-card bill and, having pledged to charge no more, remain befuddled that the balance does not disappear.~Ta-Nehisi Coates

- You know, the two great crimes in American history is obviously...the near destruction...of this country's Native American population, the theft of their land, and on to work that land was brought in native Africans into this country, beginning in 1619. Those twin processes profoundly altered the shape of the world and made this country possible. Obviously, first of all, you know, the land on which America and Americans currently reside was the land of Native Americans, but the people brought in to break that land just transformed it.
- The profits derived from slavery are more extreme than I think are commonly acknowledged. As I said yesterday, in 1860, the combined worth of the 4 million enslaved black people in this country was some $3 billion, nearly $75 billion in today's share of dollars. Cotton, in 1860, was this country's largest export—not just its largest export, it was the majority of exports out of this country. So, from a financial perspective, just the economics of it, it's absolutely impossible to imagine America without enslavement.
- The onset of the Civil War, the greatest preponderance, the greatest population per capita of millionaires and multimillionaires in this country was in the Mississippi River Valley. It wasn't in Boston, wasn't in Chicago, wasn't in New York. The richest people in this country were slaveholders. Most of our earliest presidents were slaveholders. And the fact that they were presidents is not incidental to the fact that they—to their slaveholding. That was how they built their wealth. That was how Thomas Jefferson built his wealth. That was how George Washington built his wealth. Individual slaves were the equivalent of, say, owning a home today. They were people, but turned into objects of extreme wealth. So, just from the economic perspective, there's that.
- The average African-American family in this country making $100,000, which is, you know, decent money, actually lives in the same kind of neighborhood that the average white family making $35,000 a year lives in. That is totally tied to the legacy of enslavement and Jim Crow and the input and the idea in the mind that white people and black people are somehow deserving of different things.
- If I injure you, the injury persists even after I actually commit the act. If I stab you, you may suffer complications long after that initial actual stabbing. If I shoot you, you may suffer complications long after that initial shooting. That's the case with African Americans. There are people well within the living memory of this country that are still suffering from the after-effects of that.
- This whole thing about who should get a check, and should we cut checks, you know, I understand those questions. That's great. Those people should support H.R. 40, though, because that's what H.R. 40 does. It tries to get that figured out, and get that math figured out, and figure out the best way to do it. But if we don't actually have a study, we can't actually answer those questions. You can't ask a doctor to make a diagnosis before there's an actual examination.

- And in terms of poverty and race in this country, again, you know, one of the things that I really, really wanted to stress is, the level of poverty specifically that you see in the African-American community is not accidental. It's not accidental. This is part of the process. The process of enslavement involves stealing something from someone. It involves taking something from someone.
- Jim Crow was theft. First and foremost, it was theft. If I tax you or if tell you you have to be loyal to this country and pledge fealty to its laws, but then I don't give you the same degree of protection, I don't give you the same access to resources that I give to another group of people, I have effectively stolen something from you. I have stolen your tax money. I have stolen your fealty.
- So, when the state of Mississippi, for instance, taxes black people and then builds one facility for education and another for—one facility for education for whites and then an inferior facility for blacks, that's theft. That's theft. If I build a public pool system and then tell you you can't use that public pool system, that's theft.
- And so, that is the long history of this country, that doesn't end, again, conservatively, until 1968. And so, there are people who are very, very much alive who have experienced that, who are suffering the after-effects and effects of that. And that's what, you know, as far as I'm concerned, the whole movement around reparations is about.
- Mitch McConnell... does not want to be responsible for enslavement that happened 150 years ago, but, yet and still, wants the right to operate his business or operate his career in a building that was built by enslaved people.
- I think the testimony was that one should not receive payment that would properly be due to the enslaved. But this country is, to this very day, receiving payment that was due to its enslavers. That's the way inheritance works in this country, however one might feel about that. If I assemble a mass of money, I have the right to pass that on to my kid. My kid has the right to do whatever and then pass it on to their kid. And so, there's something fundamentally injust if I have secured that money by taking it from one group, and then I pass that money on to my kid.

To us, therefore, you are more than a prime minister. You are a grandson of the Jamaican soil who has been privileged and enriched by your forebears' sins of the enslavement of our ancestors. As we prepare for you a red carpet befitting your formal status we invite you to cast your eyes upon the colours of our national flag that symbolise the history we share. You are, Sir, a prized product of this land and the bonanza benefits reaped by your family and inherited by you continue to bind us together like birds of a feather. ~ Sir Hilary Beckles, Chairman of the CARICOM Reparations Commission

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Joe Biden Shouldn't Be President, Democracy Now **(20 June 2019)**

(full program & transcript online) (https://www.democracynow.org/2019/6/20/ta_nehisis_coates_joe_biden_segregation#transcript)

- Joe Biden shouldn't be president. You know? ...when you have somebody who is celebrating their relationship... [with a] person who saw no problem depriving an entire population of African Americans in their state of the right to vote, the right to participate as American citizens... And so, I don't know what is going on in your brain where you decide to celebrate the fact these people were polite.
- You know, Joe Biden says that he's been involved with civil rights his entire career. It's worth remembering Joe Biden opposed busing and bragged about it, you know, in the 1970s. Joe Biden is on the record as being to the right of actually the New Democrats in the 1990s on the issue of mass incarceration, wanted more people sentenced to the death penalty, wanted more jails. And so, you know, I'm not surprised. I mean, this is who Joe Biden is.
- A large portion of this country... want to see somebody who can beat Trump. I get that. And there is, you know, a feeling, I think, among certain people that Joe Biden can out-white-man Donald Trump.... I get that beating Donald Trump is extremely, externally important. I get that. But I just hope that that's the floor and not the ceiling.

- Well, I think I should say before I say that, my understanding is that Senator Sanders now supports H.R. 40. I think that's where we are now. So I'm obviously pretty pleased about that.

- I think all of the things that Bernie Sanders... listed about paying attention to distressed communities should be done. And we should also have reparations. So, I don't see those two things as in conflict. It's not clear to me why both can't be on the agenda. In fact, it was never clear to me why both can't be on the agenda, why one can't associate themselves with the massive gaps in the wealth, that don't just exist in the African-American community, but exist in communities across the country, and at the same time recognize that there's something specific about the gap in the African-American community that's tied to the specificity of American history. But, you know, as I said, I'm happy Senator Sanders now supports H.R. 40.

***We Have the Means to Fund Reparations. Where Is the Political Will? Truthout*, Dedrick Asante-Muhammad & Chuck Collins, (26 May 2019)**

Full text online (https://truthout.org/articles/we-have-the-means-to-fund-reparations-where-is-the-political-will/)

- Our research points to a multigenerational legacy of white supremacy in asset building and wealth concentration — a history that includes the African slave trade, Jim Crow and systematic discrimination in wealth-building opportunities right on up to the present. That trend is getting worse, not better. Between 1983 and 2016, the median net worth for Black Americans actually went down by 50 percent. Paired with a growing Latin population that also lags far behind whites in household wealth, the U.S.'s overall median wealth trended downward over those decades, even as median white wealth increased.... A major reason for the growing wealth divide isn't that white people "worked harder." It's that the government worked harder for them.
- The key point is that unpaid labor by millions of people of African heritage was a foundation of the social wealth in the United States. Immigrants with European heritage directly and indirectly benefited from this foundation of social wealth and white supremacy, even if they never had anything to do with slavery.

- While many whites were able to board an express train to middle-class wealth between 1945 and 1975, people of color were left waiting for a train that never showed up. As a result of government subsidies, white homeownership rates steadily rose to as high as 75 percent in 2005, while Black rates peaked at 46 percent the same year — a 30-point gap that persists to this day.Since then, subsequent generations of white families have been able to help their children buy homes and go to college through what sociologists call the "intergenerational transmission of advantage," while Black families lacked the financial stability to do the same....

- We have the method and the means to fund a reparations program. Only the political will is missing
  -Sen. Elizabeth Warren, for instance, has proposed a 2 percent annual tax on wealth over $50 million, with the rate rising to 3 percent on wealth over $1 billion. Such a proposal would generate an estimated $2.75 trillion over the next decade.
  -A progressive tax on inheritances over $10 million, meanwhile, would also generate substantial revenue, almost entirely from extremely wealthy families that have benefited from generations of white advantage in wealth building.
  -Second, we propose hefty penalties on wealthy individuals and corporations that hide their wealth offshore or in complicated trusts to avoid taxation. Part of the austerity many of our communities face is the result of the estimated 8 to 10 percent of all global wealth that's now hidden offshore. A tax on wealth and stiffer penalties on tax dodging would have beneficial impacts on the larger economy for all workers, not just those who face racial exclusion.
  -A third source of financing would be to redesign existing wealth-building subsidies. The current U.S. tax code provides over $600 billion a year in tax subsidies — such as homeownership subsidies and retirement savings programs — that are skewed dramatically to the wealthiest households. Shifting these expenditures toward wealth-building programs for low-wealth people, particularly those of color, would have a

monumental impact.
In short, we have the method and the means to fund a reparations program. Only the political will is missing.

- In 1988, President Ronald Reagan formally apologized for the U.S. internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and, under the Civil Liberties Act, paid $20,000 in reparations each to over 800,000 victims. Over $1.1 billion was initially allocated, with additional appropriations later.
  At the international level, Germany has paid over $89 billion in reparations to victims of the Holocaust. German officials continue to meet with groups of survivors and their advocates to revisit guidelines and ensure that survivors receive the benefits.

- There's no reason to believe a similarly viable program couldn't be designed for Americans living with the ongoing effects of slavery, violence and discrimination. (Or, we should add, genocide. We believe there's a similarly compelling case for reparations to America's First Nations that deserves its own treatment.)

2020

- Legislation that would establish a commission to study the consequences and impacts of slavery and make recommendations for reparations proposals is likely to get a vote this year from the full Congress, Democratic lawmakers said... A spokesperson for Democratic Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas, who is the sponsor of the legislation, said she is "confident" the bill will receive a vote in the House during this Congress, though its future is uncertain at the moment. "In response to our current focus on Black inequality, H.R. 40 allows for the first constructive, scholarly conversation on race that is clearly needed in the U.S. today," Remmington Belford, a spokesperson for Jackson Lee, told CNN. "It offers full discussion on the analysis of economic, political, psychological, scientific, and sociological effects of slavery in the US."... The bill's next stop is a full committee hearing, followed by a vote in the House... A potential reexamining of the proposal comes as the United States is reeling from the recent deaths of several black Americans at the hands of the police, including Floyd, who died in Minneapolis last month after a white police officer knelt on his neck for more than eight minutes. Widespread protests across the country have called for codified change in how the law treats the black community.
  - Democratic lawmakers call for vote on bill to study reparations, By Jamie Ehrlich, *CNN* (https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/10/politics/reparations-congress-bill-vote/index.html) (10 June 2020)

- The bill would create a commission of 13 members who would compile a report of findings and recommendations on the issue and send it to Congress. Former Democratic Rep. John Conyers of Michigan, who served until 2017, had previously introduced legislation on reparations repeatedly over the span of multiple sessions of Congress.... Jackson Lee said in a press release that "the Commission aims to study the impact of slavery and continuing discrimination against African-Americans, resulting directly and indirectly from slavery to segregation to the desegregation process and the present day." The issue of reparations also gained steam through the 2020 Democratic primary, with several candidates endorsing some form of reparations. Several endorsed Jackson Lee's bill, including Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden.
  - Democratic lawmakers call for vote on bill to study reparations, By Jamie Ehrlich, *CNN* (https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/10/politics/reparations-congress-bill-vote/index.html) (10 June 2020)

- As the American civil war reached its bloody end in 1865, the Union general William Sherman seized land from Confederates and mandated it be redistributed, in 40-acre plots, to newly freed slaves. The promise of "40 acres and a mule" was never fulfilled. But a debate has raged ever since about what America owes to the descendants of slaves, and to the victims of racial terror and state-sanctioned discrimination that persisted long after emancipation.
  - Calls for reparations are growing louder. How is the US responding?, by Lauren Gambino, *The Guardian* (https://www.theguardian.com/wor

ld/2020/jun/20/joe-biden-reparations-slavery-george-floyd-protests), 20 June 2020

- We helped build this nation. We built the United States Capitol. We built the White House. We made cotton king and that built the early economy of the United States. We were never paid, never given insurance, never received compensation for the more than 200 years of living and working in bondage. And we continue to live with the stain of slavery today... Look at the protests. Look at the protesters. We are winning the hearts and minds of the American people. That's why I think the time to pass reparations is now.
  - Sheila Jackson Lee quoted in Calls for reparations are growing louder. How is the US responding?, by Lauren Gambino, *The Guardian*, 20 June 2020

2022

- Early on in the process, the taskforce reviewed other examples of reparations programs throughout the world. Germany paid $89bn in restitution to Holocaust victims while the United States paid $20,000 each to the 82,219 Japanese Americans who were unlawfully incarcerated during the second world war. In 2015, the United States authorized payments of up to $10,000 per day – a total of $4.4m each – for the dozens of people taken hostage in Iran in 1979. A Kirsten Mullen, co-author of From Here to Equality, told the taskforce that following that same math, the payment for one Black American who endured a single decade under Jim Crow would be $36.5m. But the challenge before this taskforce is that so many of the injustices suffered and opportunities lost by Black Americans "can't be quantified", Weber (California Secretary of State) said
  - If not us, then who?': inside the landmark push for reparations for Black Californians, by Vivian Ho, *The Guardian*, 9 January 2022
- You can't quantify my father's lack of education and the negative experience that he had just trying to survive for himself and his family. You have to begin to say, OK, what do we do in terms of opening up this particular society in a way that really makes an effort to create the opportunities not just for those who are here but also for the next generation to come? You can't buy that with $20,000.
  - Shirley Weber, (Secretary of State for California)]], As quoted in *If not us, then who?*: inside the landmark push for reparations for Black Californians, by Vivian Ho, *The Guardian*, 9 January 2022
- This 400-year challenge is not going to be solved in 400 days. It will take much more than that, and a commitment from the state of California, the fifth-largest economy in the world, to make that happen.
  - Shirley Weber, (Secretary of State for California)]], As quoted in *If not us, then who?*: inside the landmark push for reparations for Black Californians, by Vivian Ho, *The Guardian*, 9 January 2022

2023

- The debate over reparations is just beginning. Come July, the controversy will kick into high gear when the California Reparations Task Force slaps a price tag on reparations and lawmakers and Gov. Newsom debate how to pay for it. Despite the sticker shock, other blue states and some Congressional Democrats may follow. "California's reparations will be the boilerplate," says board member Reginald Jones-Sawyer. "They're going to take our blueprint and start with that to determine what national reparations will be." In a 500-page interim report, the 9 member California task force details what it considers 300 years of repression and discrimination for which Black Americans deserve compensation. It cites government policies, Jim Crow laws and redlining for causing the wealth gap between white and black communities.
  - *Fox News*, San Francisco reparations proposal makes waves: 'America must admit its sin', 18 January 2023

- An activist at a slavery reparations meeting in California blasted the $223,000 payments proposed for black residents in the state - yelling almost a quarter of a million dollars for each person is 'not enough'. The eye-popping outburst came from Reverend Tony Pierce who voiced his dissatisfaction after California Secretary of State Dr. Shirley Weber opened up the floor to the public. Activist at slavery reparations meeting in California blasts the proposed $223,000 payments. Nine task force members held the meeting in San Diego and welcomed guests for public comments to discuss California AB 3121, the bill signed by Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom looking into reparations for black citizens. The group is 'studying the institution of slavery and its lingering negative effects on living African Americans, including descendants of persons enslaved in the United States and on society.'
  - *Daily Mail*, Activist says $223,000 in reparations for black Californians is 'not enough', 28 January 2023

See also

- Black Lives Matter
- Forty acres and a mule
- H.R. 40 - Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act
- I Have a Dream (MLK speech)
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
- Post-racial America
- Racism
- Racism in the United States
- Redistribution of income and wealth
- Slavery

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